

Middlebury College Organic Garden

Food Educator's Report for 2016

Internships

Through the generous support of alumni gifts and earned income from the farm's produce sales, the Middlebury College Organic Farm was able to offer summer internships to four undergraduate students: Kate Porterfield ('18), Asher Brown ('20), Emma Patch('20) and Mike Pallozzi ('17.5). We also were able to hire Dan Cho ('20) and Hannah Patterson ('19) as spring/fall interns.

Student Projects: The grand project for the summer was installing the new pizza oven, enclosing three side of the pizza oven structure, building counters and staining the siding. The project included moving a 2500 pound oven four times with the help of a fork lift and exceptional staff from Facilities as well a working with a master mason to build the oven support.

School of the Environment

The opening ceremony for the year Middlebury College School of the Environment was held at the College Farm in June. This was the third year the opening ceremony was held at the farm. School of the Environment Director Steve Trombulak and many other college officials attended. The ceremony included the planting and dedication of a native Vermont elderberry seedling. Professor Trombulak has incorporated a tree planting ceremony at the organic farm to be a regular part of the opening of the School of the Environment.

Production Garden

As in 2015 we had a late start caused by a very cold and dry spring conditions. Our biggest challenge turned out to be drought. It was a summer that produced the least rain of the 14 years we've been at the Knoll. Our core group of crops we sell to Midd Dining (Swiss chard, kale, tomatoes, head lettuce, collards and basil) had mixed success. The tomatoes (especially the outdoor biochar experiment) and other heat lovers were the most productive ever, while our lettuce production was much below norm. We grow at least 40 other crops for sales to smaller college venues and for Otter Creek Bakery. We also supply a large amount of produce for Weybridge House that is used fresh or preserved for winter use. Our goal is to grow a mix of diversified crops so the interns can learn how to grow many different types of vegetables, herbs and fruits. We also grow many varieties of flowers including wildflowers. We grow them predominantly for pollinator and beneficial insect food, but we also grow several varieties of flowers for cutting.

Community Involvement

As in past year's we grow specific crops to be donated to the H.O.P.E. food shelf in Middlebury. This year we brought HOPE green beans, zucchini, carrots and butternut

squash. For the first time we grew green beans specifically for freezing as HOPE now has access to a flash freezing unit.

In March Jay visited the Metta Earth Institute in South Lincoln, VT where many Middlebury College graduates have worked. The opportunities at Metta Earth have been mostly word of mouth and we will continue to use that approach for the upcoming year.

In April, Jay presented a slide show and talk about the farm at the Massachusetts Sustainability Conference at Hampshire College.

In July the farm interns went to the Cornwall Elementary School to help with maintenance and planting of fall crops with students and parents. In September the Kindergarten, First and Second grade classes from Cornwall visited the farm.

Intern field trips

Field trips provide an opportunity to see first-hand the diverse the type of crops grown by Vermont farmers. Each farm is also a very unique business using different approaches to sustainability. This season we visited Golden Russet Farm, Foggy Meadow Farm, the Elmer Farm, Lincoln Peak Vineyard, and Windfall Orchard.

Events at the Farm

For Reunion in June the Organic Farm hosted an open house and tour for alumni. Over 100 alumni attended. Alumni spent time with the interns and farm educator learning about the production methods of our garden. In the many discussions between alumni visitors and current students is the opportunity to connect past and present generations of Middlebury College students. We also ran tours of the farm for Fall Family Weekend. Many interested family members and alumni toured the farm.

For the Clifford symposium and its theme of mindfulness the farm interns hosted a dinner for 60 people with food cooked at the new pizza oven.

Both the spring planting and fall harvest festivals organized by the student organization MCOF drew over 200 attendees for each event.

Sister to Sister program held a bonfire at the farm.

Classes/Workshops at the Farm

Classes from the Psychology, Biology, Environmental Studies, Physics, Geology, Italian, Art and Architecture, and Dance departments were held at the garden in spring and fall of 2016. Maree Remalia and her Roots of Movement dance group choreographed a special performance for the farm.

Marc Lapin held a Workshop for Change Makers at the farm in late April.

In September the farm hosted tours of the site for new students and exchange students as part of campus orientation.

Kate Hodges a local artist held two sessions of a children's art camp at the farm.

Research at the Farm

For several years the organic farm has collaborated with faculty members to create research opportunities for students. As part of each course that uses the farm for research students have opportunities to put theory into practice. The research projects are generated by the focus of each course and needs of the farm to learn more about our unique physical location and microclimate.

For the fourth consecutive year we hosted lab experiments for Marc Lapin's ES 112 class. The summer interns transplanted the same broccoli variety into a control plot using clean cultivation and into another plot planted in a cover crop. Marc's class harvested and evaluated in late September, made measurements of yield for each treatment and evaluated other factors like soil type and previous soil treatment.

Kate Porterfield one of the summer interns ran an experiment with tomatoes planted in differing concentrations of biochar. The biochar was obtained from Shelburne Farms. Tomatoes were harvested throughout the season with counts per plant and weight per plant recorded.

Seed saving and seed trials

This is the 14th year we've run seed trials at the farm. With a generous donation of seeds from Renee's Garden seed company we ran trials on new varieties of chard, spinach, Brussels sprouts and flowers for pollinators. We trialed several paste tomato varieties in our hoop house.

We also grew Hopi Black sunflowers from seed we saved from last year. These were sent to us in 2015 from a seed swap at Eco-Farm conference. We saved seed from the original planting in 2015 and the 2016 sunflowers were true to type.

Visitors to the garden in 2016

During the summer we had several community volunteers and visitors spend time at the farm.

Professor Tomiko Yamaguchi a faculty member at the International Christian University in Tokyo visited to share ideas on sustainable food production. ICU is a Middlebury partner.

David Barenbo from the Dance Company of Pittsburgh visited the site to help with preparations for the Roots of Movement dance performance.

Jason Scorse, assistant professor and Director of the Blue Economy project at Monterrey Institute visited as a first step to a collaborative program with MIIS.

Mark Spiro, professor of biology at Bucknell University visited to observe our program and get feedback on his ideas for starting a farm at Bucknell.

Jessica Gigot ('01) farmer and educator from Washington State visited the site and shared ideas on farm education programs.

